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Regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

Trends and activities

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I. Work of the regional commissions in normative and operational activities

1. As the regional expression of United Nations activities in the economic and social sectors, the regional commissions share certain commonalities. They remain the only permanent intergovernmental bodies within the United Nations system which comprise all countries of their respective regions, and therefore provide a comprehensive framework for region-wide cooperation. They are also the only forum in which all countries of the region can participate on an equal footing. As an integral part of their respective regions, each represents a unique regional character in complying with the collective wishes of its member States, often reflecting regional specificity in the activities being undertaken. As part of the United Nations, they also serve as funnel points through which international cooperation is directed at the regional level — a role most recently mandated for them in the various programmes of action for follow-up to the world conferences.

A. Economic Commission for Europe

2. With regard to policy and analysis, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) *Economic Survey of Europe*, which is now an annual volume of three issues, continues to provide in-depth analyses of economic developments in the region. In particular, over the past year, the *Survey* has examined carefully the origins and nature of the Russian crisis and the impact of both the Asian and Russian financial crises on the economies of the region, especially those of Central and Eastern Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries. It has also identified a number of external and domestic obstacles that put at risk the transition process and hamper economic recovery. A major conclusion is that in many transition economies, traditional stabilization policies may lead to the opposite results of those intended, especially when the appropriate institutional framework of a market economy is missing or incomplete. In addition, growth and employment have to be restored to a more prominent position among the objectives of policy. The need to introduce measures directed at supporting growth alongside stabilization and reform programmes in order to establish mutual support between them, is therefore stressed.

3. As in the previous year, an annual economic seminar was organized prior to the annual session of the Commission and its outcome will be the basis for the second issue of the *Survey*. This year, the theme of the seminar was the economic implications of population ageing in the ECE region. During the Commission session itself, held from 4 to 6 May 1999, panel discussions were organized on three of the major economic issues confronting the region: (a) the impact of the global financial economic crisis on the ECE region, with special emphasis on Western and Central Europe; (b) overcoming the crisis of the Russian economy; and (c) threats to the transition process in other economies.

4. In the area of norms and standards, ECE has continued its work in the development of normative instruments, thereby fostering regional cooperation, facilitating economic integration and promoting policy convergence.

5. In the field of environment, the regional ministerial conference on the theme "Environment for Europe" held at Aarhus, Denmark, in June 1998, adopted a convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters. The conference also adopted two protocols to the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution: one on heavy metals and one on persistent organic pollutants (POPs). The latter provides an input to the ongoing negotiations on a global convention on this item. In addition, the conference endorsed a strategy to phase out leaded petrol for general use by road vehicles and a policy statement on energy efficiency.

6. ECE is actively participating in the preparations for the ministerial conference on health and environment to be held in June 1999 in London. The conference is expected to adopt a protocol on water and health to the ECE Convention on Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, as well as a charter on transport, environment and health.

7. The environmental performance review (EPR) programme produces assessments of and policy recommendations for individual ECE member countries in transition. Since April 1998, Lithuania and Latvia have received and implemented EPR recommendations. Reviews on the Russian Federation (in cooperation with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)), Ukraine and Croatia are presently under preparation.

8. In the field of transport, the following agreements have been amended: the European Agreements on Main International Traffic Arteries, Main International Rail Arteries, and Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations (AGTC); the European Agreement supplementing the 1968 Convention on Road Traffic; the 1958 Agreement on the Construction of Vehicles; the European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road; and the Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods

under cover of TIR Carnets. Additionally, the following new legal instruments were elaborated: the Protocol on Combined Transport on Inland Waterways to AGTC, the Agreement concerning the Adoption of Uniform Conditions for Periodical Technical Inspections of Wheeled Vehicles, and the Agreement concerning the Adoption of Global Technical Regulations for the Construction of Vehicles. Furthermore, in the framework of the relevant Economic and Social Council Committee of Experts, serviced by the ECE secretariat, the United Nations Recommendations on the Transport of Dangerous Goods were and continued to be updated.

9. In statistics, standard principles and concepts contribute to common understanding and promote data reliability and comparability in the region. The population and housing census recommendations, established by ECE in close collaboration with the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) have contributed to the undertaking of national population and housing censuses in the 2000 round, which is well under way in the countries of the region.

10. The ECE *Statistical Yearbook: Trends in Europe and North America* presents data in a user-friendly way for non-statisticians. This is a relatively new publication, the third edition of which has recently been released, and the fourth edition will be published in the year 2000. Preparation is also under way to produce the publication *Women and Men in Europe and North America*, the release of which is planned to coincide with the mid-term assessment of progress since Beijing.

11. In the area of trade, the Centre for Facilitation of Procedures and Practices for Administration, Commerce and Transport (CEFACT) recently approved four revised or new trade facilitation recommendations. CEFACT also has the responsibility for maintaining and developing UN/EDIFACT which is the only international standard for electronic data interchange (EDI). During the year, two new UN/EDIFACT directories have been published. In 1998, a memorandum of understanding was signed between ECE, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) concerning standardization in the field of electronic business.

12. Several ECE standards on the commercial quality of agricultural produce (fresh fruit and vegetables, dry and dried fruit, meat) have been agreed. ECE continues to cooperate closely with the European Union (EU) to harmonize EU and ECE standards and the standards used by the OECD scheme for the application of international standards for fruit and vegetables.

13. In the field of natural gas, two projects — technological and ecological norms, required for the design and operation of the gas distribution networks, and existing standards and regulations on permissible concentrations of harmful components in gaseous fuels and gaseous fuels combustion products — have been launched.

14. Energy efficiency standards and labels represent a key area of work that has been taken up in the SACHA project supported by the European Commission Specific Actions for Vigorous Energy Efficiency (SAVE) programme within the framework of the Energy Efficiency 2000 project. The European Commission has approved a second phase of the SACHA project, with more countries participating and an expanded coverage to include lighting as well as a wider range of appliances.

15. The ECE Committee on Human Settlements has focused on specific policy issues based on best practices and case studies. Within the framework of the in-depth reviews of housing in countries with economies in transition, a report on Slovakia is being finalized, and the report on Lithuania is expected to be finalized by September 1999.

16. In the field of timber, ECE's work on the temperate and boreal forest resource assessment 2000, undertaken jointly with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), has produced the most comprehensive set of information available at present on the extent and condition of temperate and boreal forests. These data, to be made available as a publication and on the Internet, will be an important input to the analysis of the progress of sustainable forest management in the region, as requested by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED).

17. In the course of 1998, operational activities continued to be carried out in support of the ECE regular programme activities on subregional groupings and initiatives, as well as in response to the needs of individual countries or groups of countries in specific areas where ECE has recognized expertise.

18. A cooperation agreement between ECE and the Central European Initiative (CEI) was signed in May 1998. This agreement provides a mechanism for the implementation of the CEI/ECE cooperation programme: a focal point within the secretariat was appointed in October 1998. Cooperation with the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) has been particularly fruitful on issues related to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and energy. ECE also provided BSEC with an analysis of major trends and problems in the subregion to serve as a framework for the establishment of a BSEC strategic programme.

19. Substantial technical assistance has been provided to the South-East European Cooperative Initiative (SECI) to help it implement its mandate of fostering cooperation among the countries of the subregion, and at the same time facilitate their access to European integration. Projects in the following fields are being implemented: border-crossing facilitation, identification of bottlenecks along main international corridors in the SECI region and short-term measures to remove them, financial policies to promote SMEs through microcredit and credit guarantee schemes, energy efficiency demonstration zones network in South-East Europe, interconnection of natural gas networks, diversification of gas supply and improvement of security of supply in South-East Europe, a recovery programme for rivers, lakes and adjacent watercourses, interconnection of electricity grids, cooperation among security markets, and combating cross-border crime and corruption.

20. Operational activities have also been undertaken by ECE in cooperation with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in the framework of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA).

21. In addition to the above activities, a number of other ECE events are noteworthy: (a) a ministerial conference on protection of forests in Europe (Lisbon, June 1998), which reviewed progress in sustainable forest management and set the directions for future international work; (b) a forum on the protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights in transition economies (Geneva, October 1998), with the participation of the EU, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO); (c) a regional population meeting, jointly organized by ECE, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Hungarian Central Statistical Office and hosted by the Government of Hungary (Budapest, December 1998); (d) a forum on improving trade finance and investment for the timber sector in the Russian Federation and the CIS (Geneva, February 1999); and (e) a seminar on trade facilitation and electronic business to promote the use of its standards and recommendations (March 1999).

B. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

22. In the wake of the Asian economic and financial crisis, the ESCAP secretariat has undertaken studies on such issues as causes, consequences and policy implications of the crisis; challenges and opportunities arising from globalization and liberalization; social impact of the crisis; information technology and development; and institutional arrangements and policies to attract foreign direct investment. The main outlets for this work are the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific, 1999*, *Asia-Pacific Development Journal*, and *Development Papers*. The economic crisis and trends relevant to the Asia and Pacific region were the focus of discussions at the fifty-fifth annual session of the Commission, held at Bangkok from 22 to 28 April 1999. The theme of the session was "Asia and Pacific into the twenty-first century: information technology, globalization, economic security and development", on which a special seminar was also organized during the ministerial segment of the Commission session.

23. In the area of regional economic cooperation, priority continues to be accorded to macroeconomic issues relating to the least developed, landlocked and Pacific island developing countries. An expert group meeting on options for exchange rate policy in the least developed countries was held at Bangkok in October 1998. A national workshop on enhancing efficiency in external aid utilization in Bangladesh was held in December 1998, and a subregional seminar on foreign direct investment promotion policy in the economies of North and Central Asia was held in Armenia in January 1999.

24. Operational activities, including assistance to developing countries in implementation of the WTO agreements and in increasing capacities to participate more effectively in multilateral trade negotiations, has been one of the priority areas of the ESCAP work programme on regional economic cooperation. In an effort to assure enhanced cooperation and efficient use of funds, the secretariats of ESCAP and WTO have agreed to institutionalize their cooperation through a memorandum of understanding, which will provide a broad framework within which a two-year WTO/ESCAP training programme for developing countries of the ESCAP region will be implemented. In the aftermath of the expansion of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), assistance was provided to the new ASEAN members to strengthen their capacity to participate effectively in the Asian Free Trade Agreement (AFTA) and other ASEAN economic cooperation programmes, keeping in view the changed economic situation in the subregion. Simultaneously, technical assistance was provided to Myanmar and Viet Nam in building national capacities for trade facilitation. Existing trade documents were aligned and standardized and submitted to the two Governments for approval. Two national workshops were held in Myanmar and Viet Nam to introduce trade facilitation measures and

tools and electronic commerce. At a subsequent regional seminar, recommendations were made for future action.

25. ESCAP has continued to pursue in more concrete terms inter-subregional cooperation in the priority areas of: trade and investment, infrastructure development, human resources development and poverty alleviation. The fourth consultative meeting organized by ESCAP among the executive heads of subregional organizations and ESCAP was held at Kathmandu in October 1998, hosted by the secretariat of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). ESCAP has continued to provide technical support to the Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC) and SPECA. An ad hoc expert group meeting addressed the issue of public-private partnership for advancing the BIMST-EC initiative.

26. A regional workshop on social development information exchange through the Internet was organized in November 1998 to provide a regional forum for representatives of Governments and NGOs concerned with promoting the quality of life of disadvantaged groups in society, to exchange views and experiences on social development information exchange through the Internet. Workshop participants were provided hands-on training on the use of a software developed by the secretariat, which provided access to a directory of Internet Web sites containing social development information.

27. ESCAP is promoting technical cooperation between local governments in Asia and the Pacific, through undertaking a comparative study of local government systems of 15 countries with the aim of catalysing discussion and action on local government reforms in the region. It has also established the Network of Local Government Training and Research Institutions in Asia and the Pacific (LOGOTRI) for building the capacities of these institutes so that they in turn can build the capacities of local governments in the region. Thus far, 20 institutes from 11 countries have joined the Network.

28. The Second Ministerial Conference on Space Applications for Sustainable Development is being organized by ESCAP, which will be hosted by India at New Delhi in November 1999. The Conference will serve as a forum to review the progress of the regional space applications programme for Asia and the Pacific and to chart out the medium- and longer-term strategy for further implementation.

29. Given the growing importance of transport and communications linkages in the region, ESCAP, in consultation with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), has developed a model multimodal framework agreement and has been actively collaborating with the ASEAN secretariat and its members in refining the framework as the basis for harmonized legislation for adoption by each of the member countries. Due to the success of that exercise, ESCAP is now proposing a similar initiative with the BIMST-EC countries to further expand the regional application of the agreement and create the basis for harmonized legislation and regulations for multimodal transport. Jointly with the World Bank, ESCAP has undertaken several activities to assist member countries in improving overall sustainability of road maintenance through introducing systems and mechanisms to secure sufficient funds. In this context, a national workshop on management and financing of road maintenance is planned for Sri Lanka later in 1999. To quantify the scale and nature of road safety problems, ESCAP joined hands with the Asian Development Bank (AsDB) to undertake major studies in the region. ESCAP is publishing a series on road safety, with the latest issue being on the guidelines for road safety action plans and programmes. To increase leverage of the regional road safety activities, the secretariat joined the Global Road Safety Partnership within the World Bank's Business Partners for Development Framework.

30. ESCAP continues to promote and facilitate regional cooperation in tourism. A working group has been organized by ESCAP, which met in April 1999 to coordinate cooperative arrangements for implementation of priority projects in the Greater Mekong Subregion. The Network of Asia-Pacific Education and Training Institutes in Tourism (APETIT) was established in 1997 and is now fully functional.

31. To promote utilization of modern technology in statistics, various activities were organized by ESCAP, including a workshop on the year 2000 problem for national statistical offices, a seminar on the application of information technology in national statistical offices, and activities concerning the development of guidelines, pilot applications, and reports on technology applications and country experience. Under a project, a nine-member working party on the application of modern technology to population data has been established, which held two meetings during 1998–1999.

C. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

32. In recent months, the Latin American and Caribbean countries had to deal simultaneously with an extremely high

degree of volatility in international finance and trade and the onslaughts of nature as rarely before in the region's history. In spite of strong negative external shocks, the region's economies performed reasonably well, even though volatility was still present during the first quarter of 1999. Furthermore, due to the delayed effect that external shocks have, the economic outlook for 1999 remains highly problematic. Several countries of the region suffered the meteorological phenomena known as "El Niño" once again, possibly with greater force than at any time since the mid-sixteenth century. In September 1998, hurricane George lashed several Caribbean islands, and a month later hurricane Mitch ravaged Central America in the worst natural disaster suffered by some of the countries of the isthmus this century. Within this context, in addition to the delivery of its regular programme of work, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) assisted the region in facing the consequences derived from those two sets of events, through a mix of normative activities in the comprehensive analysis of development and public policy-making, and operational activities in the form of technical assistance, specialized information and training.

33. Within its analytical activities regarding the main trends in world economy and the challenges and opportunities derived from them, ECLAC paid a great deal of attention to the repercussions of the international financial crisis. A report on the impact of the Asian crisis on Latin America, which provided an extensive analysis of the medium and long-term impact of the crisis and policy-making recommendations, was presented to the Commission at its twenty-seventh session. Later on, as the situation aggravated with the Russian crisis, ECLAC prepared a statement in which it offered the region an institutional opinion on the fundamental problem in the global economy: the enormous discrepancy between an increasingly sophisticated and dynamic international financial world and the lack of proper institutional framework to regulate it, and called for the establishment of an appropriate institutional framework for financial globalization. ECLAC also coordinated the Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs task force, which produced a report entitled "Towards a new international financial architecture". The report presented recommendations in six key areas: global consistency of macroeconomic policies; institutional reforms aimed at providing adequate international liquidity in times of crisis; adoption of codes of conduct, improved information, and financial supervision and regulation; the preservation of autonomy for developing and transitional economies with regard to capital account matters; the incorporation of internationally sanctioned standstill provisions into international lending; and the design of a network of regional and subregional organizations to support monetary and financial management.

34. Another area in which ECLAC continued to be active is providing support to member States in the analysis of the conceptual and practical problems that they face as the region advances in the fulfilment of integration commitments. During the Second Summit of the Americas (18 and 19 April 1998, Santiago), in addition to requesting ECLAC to continue with its support for the Free Trade Area of the Americas, the heads of States requested the Commission to widen its assistance to the integration process to include the areas of education, transportation, micro, small and medium enterprises, and women issues. As a result, there was a significant increase in activities in support of the different institutional arrangements established for the implementation of the Santiago Plan of Action, such as negotiating, consultative and expert groups, as well ministerial level forums at the request of which ECLAC has produced different kinds of inputs.

35. ECLAC continued with the analysis of the significant economic and institutional reforms carried out by Governments in the region, aimed at evaluating their impact on the performance of the region's economies, with emphasis on the results in terms of economic growth and social equity. In order to widen the scope of the analysis, in terms of both the links between micro- and macroeconomics and the links between economic policies and social evolution, inter-divisional cooperation was deepened through the implementation of multidisciplinary research projects, such as one entitled "Growth, employment and equity: Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1990s". In fulfilment of a mandate from the twenty-seventh session, national seminars on the theme "The fiscal covenant" were carried out in Argentina, Brazil, Jamaica and Mexico, as well as subregional seminars for the Caribbean and for Central America. Support was also given to countries in the design, implementation and monitoring of social policies and programmes, particularly in the areas of education, health and poverty eradication and income distribution.

36. At the level of microeconomic analysis, ECLAC continued collaborating with the countries in the region in the development of policies designed to strengthen the technological dimension of production activities, increase competitiveness, overcome bottlenecks in key production markets and stimulate entrepreneurial development. Several research projects on the development potential of natural resource-based clusters have begun, dealing with forestry, mining, energy, dairy industry and tourism. Activities also continued in the area of technological innovation, technical

and professional training, small and medium-sized firms and international competitiveness. In the area of natural resources and sustainable development, ECLAC continued providing technical assistance to countries in the region in policy-making, institution-building and regulatory matters, particularly in the fields of energy, mining, marine resources and human settlements. Activities in this area included technical assistance to Governments in the fulfilment of national commitments adopted at United Nations global conferences, and to parliaments in the development of regulatory frameworks for mining, energy and water resources aimed at improving the efficiency of their exploitation.

37. Another area in which ECLAC has been providing services to the region is software development in the fields of census information and country competitivity analysis. During the reporting period, the Windows version of "Redatam-Plus" was launched, together with a derived tool called "ZonPlan". These programs, developed by the Latin American Demographic Centre (CELADE), facilitate the use of census information at the local level. Progress was also achieved in the improvement of the Windows 95 versions of the Country Competitivity Analysis Program (CANPLUS) and the Program for the Analysis of Industry Dynamics (PADI).

38. ECLAC has continued its efforts to increase and optimize the dissemination of its work, including the findings of its monitoring of economic and social trends. In the case of the *Preliminary Overview of the Economy of Latin America and the Caribbean*, the 1998 edition included an evaluation of the impact of the international financial crisis, and for the first time included projections for the following year. During the period under review, ECLAC published the editions of its *Social Panorama of Latin America* corresponding to 1997, which focused on the structural aspects of income distribution, the composition of employment and the transmission between generations of educational and labour opportunities, and to 1998, which concentrated on social expenditure and the situation of poverty in the region. Likewise, the editions of the *Report on Foreign Investment in Latin America and the Caribbean* for 1997 and 1998 were published. The first took a new approach to the subject and included detailed analysis of foreign direct investment (FDI) corporate strategies of major investors, and paid special attention to regional investment abroad; the second emphasized the positive effects that the global financial crisis has had on FDI in the region. ECLAC also published for the third time the overview of Latin America and the Caribbean's position in the international economy, which has become one of the Commission's flagship reports; the 1997–1998 edition of the *Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean*; and the 1998 edition of the *Statistical Yearbook of Latin America and the Caribbean*. In 1998, ECLAC began the process of standardization in the format of its major publications, aimed at strengthening its institutional image among its wide and growing public. Along the same line, ECLAC also launched *Notas de la CEPAL*, a new bi-monthly newsletter which replaced four different publications produced previously by its Information Service. One of the most significant indicators of the progress achieved in terms of dissemination of the Commission's works are the Internet statistics: the number of visits to ECLAC Santiago Web site and its United States mirrorside have increased almost fourfold since March 1998.

39. As indicated earlier, ECLAC sent multidisciplinary missions to seven countries to assess the socio-economic effects of the natural disasters and prepare detailed reports for the national Governments. These reports included estimates of damage and reconstruction costs by sector, including the environmental impact and project profiles for the stages of rehabilitation and reconstruction, using a methodology developed by the Commission over more than 25 years of experience in this field. The scale of these disasters and the level of damage caused showed the region's extreme vulnerability to such events, underlining the indissoluble link between development, environmental sustainability and the risk of catastrophic damage.

40. In the area of training, the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning (ILPES) offered six international and one subregional course, with the participation of 163 professionals; and the Population Division (former CELADE) offered the twenty-first intensive course on demographic analysis for development, with the participation of 18 professionals from the region and some African countries. In addition to these direct training activities and the training component of most technical assistance activities, ECLAC collaborated with many universities and higher education centres within the region and in Europe.

D. Economic Commission for Africa

41. A persistent and continuing concern of countries in the region is the need to mobilize and manage financial resources for their development. This provided the backdrop to the thirty-third session of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) held from 6 to 8 May 1999, organized as a joint meeting of the Ministers of Economic Development and

Planning and Ministers of Finance. The theme of the joint conference was "The challenges of financing development in Africa". A ministerial policy debate on the theme and two panel discussions, focusing respectively on aid effectiveness and Africa's external debt, were held in the context of the theme. An important outcome of the meeting was the adoption of a ministerial statement which drew attention to and articulated policy measures on improving the economic policy environment of individual countries, increasing the quality and quantity of official development assistance (ODA), reversing capital flight, intensifying efforts in domestic resources mobilization and improving the terms and conditions of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative through deeper, broader and faster relief, with greatly relaxed eligibility criteria.

42. Moreover, during the past year, ECA undertook a range of analytical, advocacy and advisory activities within the components of its new thematic structure. In the area of economic policy analysis, ECA published the *Economic Report 1999: The Challenge of Poverty Reduction and Sustainability*. The report reviewed the performance of the region in 1998 from the perspective of the capability of the region to attain the development objective of reducing poverty by half by the year 2015. It found that there was a large gap between resources available from domestic resources and the volume of investment required to make an impact on poverty reduction. The report also proposed new indices for evaluating the performance and sustainability of African economies, including a financial economic performance index, an economic sustainability index and an economic policy index.

43. A major component of ECA's social policy analytical work is poverty monitoring and assessment. Several studies were undertaken, which focused on the implications of macroeconomic policies on equity and growth; gender characteristics of poverty, with emphasis on the rural sector; the impact of anti-poverty policies and programmes; and the effect of the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) pandemic and its implications for human resource utilization in Africa. The educational aspect of poverty was examined in two studies, entitled "Non-formal distance education in Cameroon and Ethiopia: lessons and experiences" and "The regional and ethnic dimensions of poverty in Africa", both of which underlined the importance of education in narrowing disparities of income and employment among various social classes and ethnic groups.

44. The area of enhancing food security and sustainable development encompasses the interrelated issues of population, environment and food security, as well as human settlements, and science and technology for development. Several studies were undertaken which covered such questions as the dynamics of food security, population and environment in Africa; promoting sustainable development of rural settlements in order to stem rural-urban migration; strengthening employment opportunities in impoverished rural areas; facilitating demographic transition; integrated management of water resources; water resource management, with particular emphasis on rain-water harvesting technologies; the role of biotechnology in increasing agricultural yields; and a strategic framework for the secretariat's intervention in science and technology.

45. A number of workshops and seminars were organized both to disseminate findings from various studies and provide opportunity for Governments to share experiences. Thus, there was a workshop on capacity-building in developing and implementing indicators for sustainable development in Africa; a national fertilizer workshop; a regional stakeholders workshop on food security and environmental linkages in the Horn of Africa; inter-country training workshop on population and development planning; post-Habitat African NGOs workshop; and a soil fertility management workshop. Some of these activities were undertaken in collaboration with other organizations, such as the World Resources Institute and the East African Office of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. A seminar on environmental and natural resources accounting was also convened. The seminar brought together 34 participants from 11 member countries, five United Nations organizations and four institutions outside the United Nations system. One of its significant achievements was the demonstration of the system of Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting (SEEA) and its potential policy uses, as well as enabling the sharing of experiences of several countries that have experimented with natural resource accounting.

46. In the fields of science and technology, a meeting of an ad hoc group of experts was convened. The meeting reviewed the compendia of published and unpublished science and technology research, applications, impacts and best practices in African countries; articulated critical science and technology issues facing Africa; and launched ECA's science and technology network (ESTNET) for Africa. The objective of the network is to foster communication and information exchange related to science and technology policies and management in Africa.

47. Work in the area of strengthening development management focuses on public sector management, private sector development and fostering popular participation to enhance civil governance. ECA conducted a number of studies aimed at deepening public sector reforms in Africa

by sharing the experience of countries within and outside the region. Such studies included civil service reform experiences in Africa; comparative study of civil service reform policies; strategies and effectiveness in other countries and lessons for Africa; and effective systems of ethics and accountability in African public services. Technical advisory services were provided in support of the workshop on ethics and accountability; workshop on service delivery improvement; workshop on local and regional planning; and workshop on governance. The studies carried out in the area of private sector development included a review of trends, approaches and strategies to private sector development; comparative case studies on private sector development of selected countries in Asia and Latin America; review of experiences in privatization, with sector-specific case studies on telecommunications, manufacturing industry, transportation and tourism; and the role of micro-financing in the sustainable development of small and medium-sized industries in Africa. The main activities undertaken in support of popular participation included the convening of an ad hoc expert group on review of activities and services to enhance the capacities of non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations in Africa, and the publication of the biannual newsletter *People First*, which reports on the activities of and policies towards non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations in Africa.

48. ECA work in the area of harnessing information for development focuses on two main clusters, namely deepening Africa's access to and participation in the information and communication revolution, and improving statistical development in Africa. The African Information Society Initiative (AISI), adopted by the Conference of Ministers Responsible for Economic and Social Development and Planning, is the action plan for promoting the development of information and communication infrastructure in the region, and the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s is the framework for the activities in statistics for ECA and its member States.

49. Implementation of AISI has taken place at the national, subregional and regional levels, with emphasis on the areas of information society awareness, policy, infrastructure and connectivity, sector applications (covering distance education, electronic commerce, health, statistics and agriculture), content development (particularly Web site development), national information and communication infrastructure policies, plans and strategies, democratizing access to the information society and expansion of African content. AISI implementation has been facilitated by partnerships with multilateral and bilateral organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, organized around the Partnership for Information and Communication Technologies in Africa (PICTA). ECA is working with UNCTAD and its PICTA partners to build electronic commerce sites in selected African countries, through local chambers of commerce and investment promotion centres. Joint projects implemented include policy and awareness workshops, tele-centre projects and organization of major conferences, such as the Global Connectivity for Africa Conference, held at Addis Ababa from 2 to 4 June 1998. ECA's AISI implementation modalities also include information dissemination (by Web site, electronic mailing lists, print and CD-ROM), advisory services, workshops, seminars and conferences.

50. Support to member States to improve their national statistical services has taken the form of advisory services in the areas of statistical organization and management and improvement of basic economic statistics to promote capacity-building, as well as technical publications designed to apprise countries of the region of current approaches and best practices. In this regard, three technical publications were issued for the benefit of the member States. The publications focused on the following issues: best practices in the formulation of statistical development plans; possible alternative approaches to population censuses in Africa; and population and housing censuses in Africa: lessons from the last four rounds. Reflecting the need for promoting geographic information, in November 1998 ECA organized an ad hoc expert group meeting to discuss a working document on integrated geographic information systems, with special attention to cadastre and land information systems for African decision makers. The meeting proposed recommendations for improving existing systems in African countries and developing new ones.

51. The activities carried out in the area of promoting regional cooperation and integration focused largely on the implementation of the Second United Nations Transport and Communications Decade in Africa (UNTACDA II), of the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community and on intra-African trade policy, as well as mineral resources development. With regard to the implementation of the UNTACDA II, an ad hoc expert group meeting was held to review and define policies for transit corridor in Africa, and two studies were undertaken on the impact of improved rural transport on women — an assessment of the sub-Saharan African transport programme, and a needs assessment for the modernization of rail track, rolling stock, telecommunications and signalling equipment in West and

Central Africa. A progress report on the implementation of UNTACDA was submitted to the General Assembly.

52. The activities undertaken in the component pertaining to the African Economic Community and intra-African trade policy included the convening of an ad hoc expert group meeting on liberalization of trade and factor mobility within Africa and the promotion of the complementarities as a basis for the expansion of intra-African trade, and a study on comparative analysis of the commitments under the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community and the agreements of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations. Additionally, several studies in the area of mineral resources and energy use were undertaken. These included policy, legal and regulatory frameworks for sustained development of mineral resources best practices; transnational corporations' contribution in the mining and energy sectors; new resources of capital for the development of Africa's mineral resources: tapping capital markets; and alternative approaches to financing energy and power development: case studies from African and other developing regions.

53. An important component of ECA work in the area of promoting the advancement of women during the period under review was the convening of several subregional follow-up meetings to the implementation of the global and regional plans of action, whose outcomes are discussed in section II below. ECA also co-sponsored the second global trade fair of the African Federation of Women Entrepreneurs, a network of national associations of women entrepreneurs which ECA helped to establish six years ago, as part of its activities to support the economic empowerment of women in Africa. The global trade fair was held at Addis Ababa in October 1998. Simultaneously, a forum on trade and investment was organized, which addressed issues of quality, productivity culture, micro-finance, industrialization, franchising, youth entrepreneurship, and technology and South-South cooperation.

54. Through trade fairs, various workshops and projects, the Federation, together with national associations of women entrepreneurs, has raised consciousness of the potential of women entrepreneurs as vehicles for growth in the private sector. As a result, women entrepreneurs have gained visibility. African countries are increasingly involving women entrepreneurs in economic decision-making, and more importantly in the formulation of national and sectoral economic plans and strategies, thus giving them opportunities to reflect their concerns in these plans.

55. Prior to the convening of the global trade fair, a three-week study tour of India and Sri Lanka for women entrepreneurs on food processing technologies was organized in June 1998 for 28 participants from 17 countries — Benin, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, and Zambia. The programme was aimed at creating opportunities for African women to share their know-how with their Asian counterparts and establish learning partnerships with them. The study tour enabled them to learn new entrepreneurial principles and general manufacturing practices. Participants were also acquainted with the concept of export production villages, which has made it possible for Sri Lanka to organize exports directly from rural areas to international markets.

56. ECA conducted two studies on gender-related issues in 1998. One was a five-country case study on access and control over land and agricultural technologies in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Kenya, Senegal and Uganda. The case studies provided a thorough analysis of the land tenure systems, including the mechanisms of control and management of land and agricultural technologies. They highlighted constraints faced by women in accessing these resources, and suggested relevant measures and actions to address the issues. The country case studies showed that access to land is linked to certain customary practices which deny women control over land. An expert group meeting organized in November 1998 to discuss these studies came up with measures to address the legal, economic and cultural aspects of the issues of land and technologies in the five countries. Another study focused on formal education as an entry point for incorporating women's rights issues into the school curricula, which aimed at raising awareness among policy makers on the role of schools in promoting these rights and in shaping future policy on the subject.

57. The main activities in the area of promoting subregional activities for development include providing technical support to and cooperation with the regional economic communities; facilitating networking and information exchange among Governments, civil society and the private sector at the subregional level; facilitating coordination services for the operational programmes of the United Nations system, in collaboration with the United Nations resident coordinator system at the national level; and strengthening ECA outreach in the subregions.

E. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

58. During the reporting period, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) secretariat continued to serve the following main objectives: act as a forum for interaction and policy coordination among member States and also between them and other actors of civil society institutions; foster regional economic development and cooperation; provide a regional link between national concerns and global issues and assess the implications of globalization on the region; propagate the harmonization of norms, standards and legislative instruments in various fields; and provide reliable statistical information and data to facilitate decision-making for policy makers and promote the use of internationally recognized statistical standards in the region. The thrust of activities completed so far was oriented towards formulating integrated regional policies and strategies in various fields, as well as formulating a vision for the region for the third millennium.

59. As a forum for interaction, ESCWA held a number of sessions of subsidiary bodies of the Commission and a host of key expert group meetings that provided policy recommendations in their respective areas of competence. All six specialized subsidiary intergovernmental bodies of ESCWA, which increased from four to six, were to become operational by May 1999. Thus, three of the subsidiary bodies of ESCWA held their sessions during the reporting period as follows: the second session of the Committee on Water Resources (Beirut, December 1998); the first session of the Transport Committee (Beirut, February 1999); and the third session of the Statistics Committee (Beirut, March 1999). The Committee on Social Development and the Committee on Water Resources will convene their second and third sessions, respectively, at Beirut in April 1999, while the first session of the Technical Committee on the Liberalization of Foreign Trade and Economic Globalization in the Countries of the ESCWA Region will be held in the United Arab Emirates in May 1999.

60. Other important policy-setting meetings have taken place in the areas of transport, science and technology, follow-up to global conferences dealing with social development, propagation of international statistical standards and trade efficiency. These meetings, which also served the objective of harmonizing policies and strategies and promoting coordination in various areas, included (a) an expert group meeting on economic reform and coordination of transport, including merchant fleets in the ESCWA region, within emerging globalization trends (Beirut, November 1998), which proposed the establishment of an integrated regional transport network to enhance regional cooperation and coordination; (b) a seminar on trade efficiency in ESCWA member countries, which assessed the status of trade efficiency in the region in the light of selected case studies and drew an action plan for consideration and adoption by member States; (c) an expert group meeting on the implications of United Nations conferences for social statistics (Beirut, December 1998), which ushered increased involvement on the part of ESCWA in the provision of social statistics; (d) a meeting on the evaluation of initial stages of the implementation of the System of National Accounts, 1993, in the region, for which ESCWA had prepared a strategy in line with its mandates to promote the use of internationally accepted statistical standards; and (e) an expert group meeting on science and technology policies and strategies in ESCWA member States for the twenty-first century (Beirut, March 1999), which reviewed attempts made in the Arab countries towards formulating science and technology policies appropriate for meeting the challenges of globalization, with the objective of promoting certain aspects of endogenous technological capacity-building. This was followed by a consultative meeting to review preparations for the World Conference on Science to be convened at Budapest, Hungary, in June/July 1999. Several of the foregoing policy-setting meetings also addressed policies and strategies for the next millennium.

61. In marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of ESCWA in 1999 and the advent of the new millennium, several other substantive activities relating to creating a future vision for the region are under way. First, the *Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the ESCWA Region* maps the socio-economic developments in the ESCWA region during the past 25 years. The *Survey* is to be followed by a meeting in May 1999 to assess economic developments in the ESCWA region during the 1990s and regional priorities for the next decade (2000–2009). The assessment would feed into a draft Beirut declaration, which will be considered by member States for adoption during the twentieth session of the Commission, in May 1999. Likewise, the sessions of several specialized subsidiary intergovernmental bodies have held or will hold satellite meetings alongside their regular sessions to emerge with similar sectoral draft declarations for consideration and adoption by member States during the Commission's twentieth session. These three faceted contributions will serve the objective of forging a consolidated regional vision and strategy for the next millennium, in line with ESCWA's multiple objectives of acting as a regional forum for interaction, fostering consolidated regional policies and

strategies, and addressing regional concerns within the framework of global considerations.

62. Another main objective of ESCWA — the collection and dissemination of reliable harmonized data and information — was met by building databases to facilitate access to a wealth of information and judicious decisions for policy makers. Further efforts were undertaken to achieve an equilibrium between databases in the economic and social fields, whereby the number of economic and social fields covered by these databases tended to be in favour of the former. This came in response to requirements generated by follow-up to the recommendations of global conferences in the field of social development. These databases cover the following areas: integrated social policies, including population, human development, women and development and human settlements; industrial statistics; national accounts; social statistics; labour force statistics, gender statistics and indicators; and the ESCWA Statistical Information System (ESIS). The latter, which was launched in 1997, involves comprehensive integrated statistical data on Arab countries. Currently, this system is used in-house to generate various statistical publications, and subsequently will be made accessible to end-users outside ESCWA.

63. The formulation of policies in the field of social development was addressed by activities which aimed at forging a new concept for sustainable development and establishing guidelines for its application. This concept is predicated on establishing a balance between social and economic development. ESCWA has been involved in establishing national networks that use this concept with member States, NGOs and other United Nations organizations, thus paving the ground for coordinated policies in this respect.

64. Efforts to pursue sustainable human development, using the foregoing concept, were applied to two main areas of work in the field of social development — poverty alleviation and local community development. In terms of poverty alleviation, after the completion of several country and regional studies on characteristics of poverty, ESCWA is in the process of formulating and recommending policy directives to alleviate poverty. In terms of local community development, ESCWA's cumulative experience in this area has resulted in a series of studies that covered the most important aspects of this approach, as well as a manual on local community development.

65. In its efforts to assess the effects of reform and deregulation measures on countries of the region, ESCWA conducted a study on unemployment, demonstrating the impact of economic reform programmes on unemployment. The study highlighted the regional dimension of unemployment and the prospects for regional cooperation in addressing the unemployment problem in countries of the region.

66. In order to support member States in introducing deregulation measures, analyse global issues with implications on the region and promote regional economic integration and cooperation, ESCWA conducted a comprehensive study and seminar on trade efficiency (November 1999) based on the experiences of five ESCWA countries. Furthermore, ESCWA assessed the implications of Euro-Mediterranean partnership agreements in economic and financial terms, and formulated a number of recommendations for consideration by policy makers in the region. Other activities relating to the implications of globalization included four national meetings on competitiveness of textiles and clothing industry. These meetings will culminate into an expert group meeting on WTO agreements and international trade in textiles and clothing in June 1999.

II. Follow-up activities to recent global conferences

67. In paragraph 8 of annex III of its resolution 1998/46, the Council reiterates that an important role has been given to the regional commission in the preparations for and follow-up to major United Nations conferences in accordance with their respective mandates and priorities. Reflecting this fact, the regional commissions, within their respective mandates, lead the efforts at the regional level in the relevant areas. The involvement of the regional commissions is based on the recognition that a comprehensive and integrated follow-up should occur at the global, regional and national levels. Within this context, inter-agency coordination meetings were regularly convened, as a collective follow-up action by the United Nations system, by the regional commissions at the regional level, as described below.

A. Economic Commission for Europe

International Conference on Population and Development

68. ECE held a regional population meeting on the five-year review on the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) at Budapest from 7 to 9 December 1998. Hosted by the Government of Hungary, the meeting

was organized jointly by ECE, UNFPA and the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. The Council of Europe closely collaborated with the organizers.

69. The meeting considered salient population developments, issues and policies in the ECE region, focusing in particular on the following five principal themes: fertility, family and gender issues; reproductive rights and sexual and reproductive health; mortality and health; population ageing; and international migration. On each of these themes, the meeting negotiated and adopted its conclusions, which have been transmitted to the Preparatory Committee for the special session of the General Assembly on the review and appraisal of the ICPD Programme of Action.

Fourth World Conference on Women

70. ECE will be organizing a regional preparatory meeting for the 2000 review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The regional meeting will address the economic issues and policies in the ECE countries relating to gender equality and the situation of women. However, the scope of the issues addressed is expected to be enlarged by organizing the meeting in partnership with UNDP, the European Commission and the Council of Europe.

Follow-up to UNCED

71. As part of the Environment for Europe Process, the Fourth Pan-European Ministerial Conference, held at Aarhus, Denmark, in June 1998, was organized by the Ad Hoc Preparatory Working Group of Senior Officials, within the framework of ECE. Work is already being planned for the next ministerial conference, to be held at Kiev.

Follow-up to both UNCED and Habitat II

72. A strategy for sustainable quality of life in human settlements in the twenty-first century has been developed and will be discussed at the sixtieth session of ECE's Committee on Human Settlements in September 1999. The strategy is based on the provisions of the Habitat Agenda and Agenda 21, with a particular emphasis on issues of common interest for all countries in the ECE region. It will reflect experiences, needs and approaches shaped by a five-decade history of cooperation within the programme activity of the Committee, which will organize, in 2000, a ministerial meeting in conjunction with its annual session to adopt the strategy.

B. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

International Conference on Population and Development

73. ESCAP, in cooperation with UNFPA, convened a high-level meeting at Bangkok from 24 to 27 March 1998, as part of the five-year ICPD review process, to review the implementation of the Bali Declaration on Population and Sustainable Development, adopted during the Fourth Asian and Pacific Population Conference in August 1992, and of the ICPD Programme of Action, adopted at Cairo in September 1994. The meeting reviewed the progress, identified constraints and recommended key future actions to further implement both instruments.

74. The ESCAP secretariat is helping countries to strengthen their monitoring system of reproductive health programmes through training and capacity-building to exchange views and information on adolescent issues with a view to promoting policies and programmes that would respond to their needs, and to understand the dynamics of population change and their implications for development in the context of an emerging global economic environment. Operational activities in the population field focused on the implementation of demonstration projects; group training; information dissemination; exchange of experiences and expertise through the organization of seminars and workshops as well as the exchange of personnel through technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC); and advisory services in support of national social development initiatives.

World Summit for Social Development

75. ESCAP will convene a senior officials' meeting on the agenda for action on social development in the ESCAP region, at Bangkok from 1 to 5 November 1999. The meeting will provide the opportunity for ESCAP members and associate members to undertake a comprehensive review of the implementation of the regional social development agenda, with particular focus on the core themes of poverty alleviation, employment expansion and social integration. The regional perspective to be considered by that meeting will also include reports on regional support measures to the World Summit for Social Development provided by other concerned United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, including the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNDP, FAO, the International

Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

76. In the area of poverty alleviation, special emphasis was given to assisting Governments in enhancing the quality of life of the poor and other disadvantaged and vulnerable social groups, including children, youth, older persons and disabled persons, through the provision of policy-oriented research and guidelines and the convening of intergovernmental meetings aimed at forging agreements on priority issues, policy approaches and regional benchmarks and their monitoring. The theme study prepared by the secretariat for the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the theme "Asia and the Pacific into the twenty-first century: prospects for social development" engendered substantive regional cooperation proposal for ESCAP action in the field of social development.

77. ESCAP has also initiated a project to assist in the establishment of national social development management information systems as a policy and management tool to monitor social progress and improve social policy planning in the context of regional and global social development commitments. The project, which is being implemented in collaboration with ILO, UNICEF and WHO, is expected to evolve a conceptual and operational framework for establishing national systems.

78. As part of the follow-up to the World Social Summit, ESCAP organized a regional meeting on a plan of action on ageing for Asia and the Pacific at Macau from 28 September to 1 October 1998. Also, ESCAP has undertaken work to support the implementation of the Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes, as adopted by the World Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth, convened at Lisbon by the United Nations in cooperation with the Government of Portugal in August 1998. As part of the implementation of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, ESCAP is providing regional support to a project to increase the accessibility and social integration of disabled persons and older persons, by helping create demonstration sites that contain visible example of barrier-free built environments in various cities.

Fourth World Conference on Women

79. ESCAP will convene a high-level intergovernmental meeting in October 1999 to assist the countries of the region in conducting their own appraisal and assessment of the progress achieved in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, considering obstacles encountered and contributing towards developing a common vision for the future. It is expected that the high-level meeting will also contribute to national capacity-building to overcome the constraints and obstacles faced by the countries of the region.

80. A regional seminar is scheduled to be held at Dhaka in July 1999 on the theme "Empowering women in poverty", which aims to formulate economic and social policies, including devising social safety nets and economic empowerment schemes, to address the issue of feminization of poverty. Also, Governments and non-governmental representatives of 14 countries of the region adopted the Bangkok Accord and Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Women at a two-day regional conference on trafficking in women, held at Bangkok on 3 and 4 November 1998. The conference was organized by ESCAP, in collaboration with ILO, the International Migration Organization, the National Commission on Women's Affairs of Thailand and the Asian Women's Fund.

Review of Agenda 21

81. ESCAP preparations are under way for the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific in the year 2000, to be hosted by Japan. The central theme will be the integration of coastal zone management, using principles of stakeholder participation for planning and management on issues of conflict resolution. The Conference is expected to provide a regional input to the forthcoming comprehensive review at the global level on the implementation of Agenda 21 of UNCED to be undertaken in the year 2002.

82. ESCAP has begun promoting public involvement and participatory approaches to environmental planning. In March 1998, a regional meeting on strategic environmental planning was held, which was followed up a year later with a regional meeting on the involvement of stakeholders in strategic environmental management. In June 1998, a regional seminar on public involvement in energy-related projects brought together government officials from both environmental and energy-related ministries to discuss the steps needed to promote public involvement in energy-related projects. ESCAP also organized in December 1998 a regional seminar to assess the impact of the financial crisis in Asia on environment and the subsequent slowdown on the energy sector of countries in the region.

Habitat II

83. ESCAP is planning to organize the Third Asia-Pacific Urban Forum in 2001, and it is also working with the South Pacific Forum to streamline the Habitat Agenda to meet the specific needs of Pacific island countries. This will provide

input on human settlements that will be presented to the forthcoming forum of economic ministers to be held in July 1999. Like previous regional urban forums, the Third Forum would include representatives of national and local governments, private sector businesses, civil society organizations, including NGOs, academic and training institutes, and the media.

Follow-up to both the Fourth World Conference on Women and Habitat II

84. ESCAP is also planning to organize the First Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors in the year 2000. As a follow-up to the Summit, national resource centres on women in local government are proposed to be set up to facilitate networking among those concerned with the issue.

C. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

International Conference on Population and Development

85. ECLAC held a meeting on population and development at Santiago, on 14 and 15 December 1998. The meeting approved a report entitled "Latin America and the Caribbean: review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development", which was prepared by the Latin American Demographic Centre — Population Division of ECLAC. The report was prepared in consultation with the Latin America and the Caribbean Division of UNFPA and with substantive inputs from the ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean and related national reports.

86. The report was presented to the international forum at The Hague (February 1999), organized by UNFPA, and served as an input to the session of the Commission on Population and Development held in March 1999. It also contributed to the preparation of the report to be presented by the Secretary-General to the special session of the General Assembly to be held from 30 June to 2 July 1999 in culmination of the review and appraisal process.

World Summit for Social Development

87. ECLAC has determined that the issue of social equity and public policy among policy makers in the region will be the central theme of the Commission's session to be held in Mexico City in April 2000. This will transform the 2000 session into a second regional conference in follow-up to the Summit, which will provide input to the special session of the General Assembly to be held near the end of the year 2000.

88. Preparations for the special session have also begun at the subregional level, including a Caribbean preparatory meeting, scheduled tentatively for 9 and 10 June 1999 at Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.

Fourth World Conference on Women

89. Two meetings of the Presiding Officers of the ECLAC Regional Conference were held, at Santiago on 14 and 15 July 1998 and at San Salvador from 2 to 4 December 1998, with broad participation by representatives of bodies and organizations of the United Nations system and intergovernmental entities. At these meetings, ECLAC reported on activities carried out in fulfillment of the regional programme of action, the Santiago Consensus and the Platform for Action in the light of the planned five-year review of implementation of the agreements emanating from the Fourth World Conference on Women and the seventh session of the Regional Conference, both events scheduled for the year 2000.

90. In addition, the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference, at their twenty-sixth meeting, recognized the importance of broadening the participation of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations at meetings of the Presiding Officers. This is to allow for an exchange of information about activities in follow-up to United Nations global summits and conferences and the development of indicators for measuring fulfillment of the agreements emanating from them.

Review of Agenda 21 — Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

91. At the request of the Caribbean Ministerial Meeting on the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, ECLAC and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) secretariats have been acting as interim secretariat for the Programme of Action, and have established an inter-agency group to support it. The Small Island Developing States Joint Inter-Agency Coordination Group has held two meetings, the first on 15 June 1998 and the second on 6 November 1998, both at ECLAC subregional headquarters at Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. The reports of these meetings present the priority actions for the effective implementation of the Programme of Action.

92. In addition, in September 1998 ECLAC published a report entitled "National implementation of the Programme

of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States: a Caribbean perspective". The report presents an assessment of the findings resulting from the replies received from 16 countries and 22 organizations to a survey of the subregion ECLAC undertook to determine what actions had been taken under the 15 priority areas that make up the Programme of Action for achieving sustainable development.

D. Economic Commission for Africa

International Conference on Population and Development

93. ECA organized the third meeting of the follow-up committee on the implementation of the Dakar/Ngor Declaration and the ICPD Programme of Action at Addis Ababa from 23 to 25 September 1998. A number of African countries informed the meeting that they have already started making major changes in the way they formulate and implement their policies based on the ICPD Programme of Action. The necessity of involving NGOs, especially women, was also stressed, as was the vital role to be played by parliamentarians in creating the right political climate for implementation.

94. For the third follow-up meeting, ECA, in collaboration with UNFPA, prepared a report entitled the "Implementation of the Dakar/Ngor Declaration and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development: an assessment of the African experience". Some of the major findings of the report were that the ICPD Programme of Action marked a major turning point in population policy development as an integral part of overall development planning by African countries; population policies and programmes in African countries are increasingly being reoriented to include more sustainable development considerations; and there is increased awareness and the recognition among policy makers of the interrelationships between population, gender equity and environment.

World Summit for Social Development

95. ECA recently convened two subregional follow-up conferences on the Summit. These conferences, for the Eastern and Southern subregions and the Northern subregion, took place at Nairobi from 15 to 17 March 1999, and at Marrakech, Morocco, from 23 to 25 March 1999. ECA is also organizing a third follow-up conference for Western and Central Africa, scheduled to take place before the end of 1999.

96. The two subregional follow-up meetings on the World Summit for Social Development held in the past year made a number of recommendations to impart new momentum to the implementation of the commitments in the Summit Programme of Action. For example, the meetings emphasized that poverty eradication and alleviation policies, programmes and strategies should be holistic, well targeted and participatory, including the involvement of the poor. Social stability must be achieved as a necessary condition for poverty alleviation and eradication of absolute forms of poverty. Governments should review macroeconomic reform measures to ensure that they are country-specific and reflect social objectives, including an assessment of their impact on employment. Development partners should support the implementation of the 20/20 Initiative, with emphasis on employment development programmes.

Fourth World Conference on Women

97. ECA will be holding a sixth African regional conference on women in follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action at Addis Ababa from 22 to 27 November 1999. In addition, ECA convened three subregional follow-up meetings for Central African countries at Bangui in July 1998; for North African countries at Rabat in November 1998; and for the Eastern and Southern African subregions in Seychelles in February 1999. Prior to these meetings, ECA held a subregional follow-up for West African countries at Dakar in November 1997.

98. The subregional follow-up meetings on the implementation of the Dakar (regional) and Beijing (global) platforms of action for the advancement of women focused on one objective: reviewing the indicators and modalities for evaluating the national plans of actions designed to assess the progress made in the implementation of the commitments in the regional and global platforms of action. The subregional meetings revealed that overall, African countries were implementing their national plans of actions with varying degrees of success, and national concerns and priorities for advancement of women differed from country to country and from subregion to subregion. Furthermore, the meetings underlined the need for ECA to provide more assistance to member States through the provision of gender training; field missions to identify the needs and programmes of countries in the subregion; and in the preparation and implementation of national plans of action.

Follow-up to UNCED

99. The first meeting of the Commission's intergovernmental Committee on Sustainable Development met at Addis Ababa from 25 to 29 January 1999. This meeting had on its agenda issues pertaining to the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. In particular, it reviewed the progress that has been made by African countries in the implementation of African strategies for the implementation of Agenda 21. Since its adoption, African Governments have taken a number of measures aimed at implementing its recommendations, including the creation of national Agenda 21s. national sustainable development commissions/ committees and national environmental action plans dealing with all 40 chapters of Agenda 21. At the subregional level, intergovernmental organizations have established mechanisms for the monitoring and evaluation of progress in implementing Agenda 21. NGOs, civil society and, to a lesser extent the private sector have also been actively involved in this implementation process at the local, national, subregional and regional levels.

Habitat II

100. The ECA Committee on Sustainable Development met at Addis Ababa from 25 to 29 January 1999 to review progress in the implementation of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). The review revealed that African countries had initiated a number of policies and mechanisms to achieve such objectives as shelter delivery, particularly to vulnerable groups; the development and use of shelter indicators; sustainable urban land use patterns and planning; promoting equal and fair access to services; improving the quality of rural settlements; ensuring effective decentralization; and promoting government partnerships with civil society, the private sector and international bodies. A number of constraints militating against the successful implementation of the recommendations of the Conference were also identified, including economic and financial constraints; technical and institutional limitations; poorly coordinated actions among government departments, NGOs, civil society, the private sector and external partners; and inadequate political will related to the use of available human and institutional capacity. Member States were encouraged to take policy measures to overcome these constraints.

E. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

International Conference on Population and Development

101. An Arab conference on implementation of ICPD was held at Beirut, from 22 to 25 September 1998, in collaboration with the League of Arab States and UNFPA. The purpose was to review and assess implementation progress of the Second Amman Declaration on Population and Development in the Arab World (1993) and the Programme of Action of ICPD (1994), to highlight obstacles to implementation, and to make recommendations for future steps to strengthen and advance the implementation process.

102. The themes of the conference were (a) "Implementing the ICPD Programme of Action and effecting population changes: a regional review"; (b) "Development strategies and population, with special emphasis on labor migration issues"; (c) Reproductive health"; (d) "Partnership with civil society and the role of NGOs in the implementation and follow-up of the Programme of Action"; (e) "Gender issues"; (f) "Monitoring and follow-up of the implementation of the Programme of Action"; and (g) "Future action".

World Summit for Social Development

103. ESCWA convened a follow-up meeting to the World Summit for Social Development at Beirut from 8 to 11 December 1998. The meeting focused on the objectives of exchange of experience; building of agreements among organizations and bodies active at the regional level with regard to fundamental social development questions; development of national capacities and standardizing preparation of national reports; and the creation of working networks and enhancement of their role.

104. In addition to raising the awareness of member States on the implications of social change, ESCWA work focuses on the current issues of concern with regard to the following priority areas: social impact of globalization with particular reference to the labour market and employment as well as tools for alleviating poverty; the social and environmental impact of urbanization, including housing and human settlement; the social and demographic impact of international migration; gender roles and partnership in the family, including youth; governance and institutions of civil society, including NGOs and community development; and reproductive health, which will be addressed for the first time. ESCWA is also building a gender-sensitive database on social policies, population, human development, human settlements, women and gender, together with demographic

data sheets. In this context, it will expand into developing indicators for monitoring of and following up to global conferences. Issues pertaining to governance and advocacy in civil society will also continue to be at the core of its work. In this respect, emphasis will be placed on the role of civil society institutions in the follow-up to recommendations of global conferences, whereby the activities will promote a participatory approach and synergy between such institutions and national governmental bodies.

Fourth World Conference on Women

105. ESCWA held the Second Arab Meeting for Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beirut from 12 to 15 December 1998, in cooperation with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). The meeting was convened in preparation for the special session of the General Assembly to be held from 5 to 9 June 2000 pursuant to Assembly resolution 52/231.

106. The main outcome of the meeting included recommendations on a general framework for the preparation of national reports on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action; guidelines for creating national institutional machinery for women's issues; strengthening NGO capacities and encouraging coordination and cooperation; and a model plan of action for Arab countries for gender mainstreaming.

Follow-up to UNCED

107. ESCWA will continue its cooperative endeavours with respect to achieving the objectives of environmental conservation and sustainable development through strengthening national capacities in the field of environment, and disseminating relevant information to assist in developing national and regional environmental profiles. ESCWA will increasingly address environmental legislation and enforcement aimed at improving the state of environment in member States. Efforts will continue to streamline the environmental dimension in all ESCWA subprogrammes, and to link their activities to those undertaken by other regional organizations to ensure complementarity and synergy at the regional level.

Arab Conference on Integrated Follow-up to Global Conferences

108. The results of the above first four meetings, which were held with the cooperation of the League of Arab States and other relevant United Nations and non-United Nations agencies, will be presented to the intergovernmental Arab Conference on Integrated Follow-up to Global Conferences to be convened by ESCWA in November 1999. The meeting will look into the recommendations of these four meetings, consolidate cross-cutting issues and adopt appropriate recommendations for follow-up at the regional level.

109. ESCWA's mainstream activities in the population, social and women-related areas are being linked with the programmed activities outlined in a three-year extrabudgetary flagship project on integrated follow-up to global conferences, which was formulated by ESCWA and supported by UNDP to forge a regional link for Arab States between the global vision and national endeavours to pursue the recommendations of global conferences. The project, put into effect in October 1998, also builds on inputs of other relevant United Nations bodies.

Habitat II

110. ESCWA held a regional meeting on follow-up to Habitat II on the theme "Implementation of the Habitat Agenda in the Arab region" at Beirut from 24 to 27 November 1998, in cooperation with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. The aim of the meeting was to promote the implementation of the Habitat Agenda through the application of the Arab Strategy for Housing and Human Settlements; to identify and consolidate regional mechanisms for the creation of networks among partners; and to propose a model for cooperation aimed at facilitating partnership and capacity-building for sustainable development.

111. The major recommendations were to support and encourage joint Arab efforts to improve living conditions and preserve the natural and living environment; to reaffirm the concept of partnership in development so as to enable all groups to play an effective role; and to consider databases as a basis for development.